

## INDEPENDENCE ON A SILVER PLATTER: THE EMERGING LIBERAL MYTHOLOGY

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Historiographical traditions have a way of going into hibernation, shedding their aged and hideous scales, and begin life anew, ready to spit the same old poison. That is what seems to have happened to imperialist historiography, dealt crashing blows in the 1960s and 1970s by nationalist and Marxist historians. The Africa of the eighties with its enduring and painful images of devastating drought, lurid tales of corruption, incessant civil wars, coups and counter-coups leading to continuous streams of refugees, and all encapsulated in those bloated or lanky skeletons bowing to death in the Sahel and Ethiopia does provide a fertile ground for the resurgence of crude, rabidly racist perceptions of Africa. Like vultures, supply-side bankers, with International Monetary Fund (IMF) or World Bank attache cases, sanctimonious Western politicians, award-seeking journalists, self-appointed 'aid' missionaries, and even publicity-starved 'pop stars,' are descending on the 'Dark Continent' to save it from "inevitable collapse."

A hundred years ago, the imperialist powers of Europe met in Berlin in 1884 to formalise the colonisation of Africa. Then one heard of Europe's "noble mission" to "civilise" those "half-devil, half-child" peoples of Africa and liberate them from savagery and debauchery, slavery and "inter-tribal" warfare, indolence and "paganism." Businessmen, politicians, missionaries and jingoistic pressmen sounded the clarion call. And anthropology with its glorification of simple, static and 'tribal' societies emerged as the intellectual handmaiden of colonialism.

Today anthropology is too discredited to play a useful role in the great intellectual and ideological struggles over Africa. The social sciences, such as political science and sociology, are too contemporaneous in their focus and methodology to provide determinate answers. That leaves history as the main battle front, for history is not merely a record of the past, but a complex conjuncture of past, present, and future. This is a paper on the continuing debates in African history, issues which once shorn of the narrow, incestuous disciplinary corridors in which they tend to be conducted, are central not only to understanding and putting into perspective Africa's contemporary crisis, but also in clarifying the ideological bases of the solutions that are being proposed in many learned journals and mass media in the West and Africa itself. Primarily the paper seeks to

demonstrate that the 'Euro-centric' tradition is experiencing a revival in African historical scholarship, appearing in repackaged themes and generalisations. It is suggested that this tradition, which is rooted in liberal ideology should be vigorously combated but not merely by restating the 'Africanist' case, which in any case, was broadly rooted in a similar bourgeois problematic, hence its failure to 'overcome' the imperialist 'school' entirely.<sup>1</sup>

### Of Beginnings and Ends

In his magnum opus, A History of Africa, published in 1978, J. D. Fage, one of the 'most renowned' authorities on African history, forcefully resurrected the 'white factor' in African history. Using scanty, unscientific and contradictory evidence, he saw caucasoids behind every nook, creek and<sub>2</sub> tree in North and North-Eastern Africa during ancient times.<sup>2</sup> To Africanists, this represents an insidious attempt to divorce Egypt from Africa, the Sphinx from the African, the continent from civilisation. But Fage's racialisation of African history presents a greater danger: it fosters endless and irrelevant quarrels about pigmentation, instead of concentrating historians' attention on more fruitful studies of material, social, religious and intellectual developments among the various peoples of Africa. African historical scholarship is being forced back to its ignoble beginnings: as complex historical processes are obscured as<sub>3</sub> they filter through the prism of race, colour and ethnicity.

Fage's ancient caucasoids and their exploits are progenitors of the latter-day imperial decolonisers. In other words, the 'white factor' being resurrected is also invading that sacrosanct of the nationalist historian's turf - decolonisation. Imperial historians are once again confident and euphoric. Their thesis: decolonisation was planned after all. The verdict: nationalism was merely of nuisance value. Imperialist historians are not the first to dismiss nationalism. For many 'radical' writers, decolonisation was 'false,' a moment full of sound and fury as the guards were changed but signifying nothing for the masses. But nationalist historians, who worshipped at the altar of tedious archival research, often backed by assiduously collected oral traditions, could ignore the dependency writers for their 'empty theorising'. Not so with the imperialist historians who rest their case on similar esoteric sources.

Until recently it was commonly held wisdom in historical circles that decolonisation largely came about as a result of nationalist pressures, whatever one may think of the content of independence. No more. Since the late 1970s imperialist historians have forcefully argued that the remarkable speed

with which most of Africa gained its independence can be attributed either to events in India, the USA, or the presence of imperial officials sitting in the stuffy chambers of the Colonial Office. It was, according to Low, "the epic struggles of the Indian National Congress (which loosened) imperial grips in tropical Africa."<sup>4</sup> Louis and Robinson find their explanation in America's "historic tradition of anti-colonialism." We are reminded that "dependence on the U.S. since 1941, "profundly influenced the official mind of British imperialism" to begin making plans for decolonisation.<sup>5</sup> By 1947 the plans were in place and Andrew Cohen of the Colonial Office had emerged as "master planner in the style of a Platonic Philosopher King (whose constitution mongering (finally) awoke the slumbering genius of nationalists in...Africa."<sup>6</sup> In short, "whatever persuaded the British empire in 1947 to plan its demise in tropical Africa, it was not the fear of black freedom fighters. It was not the black, but the white freedom fighters in Kenya, Rhodesia, England and the United States that were jolting their assurance in the years 1941-1947."<sup>7</sup>

While eschewing these extravagant claims, Hargreaves still argues that it was during the Second World War that the transfer of power to "African hands, formerly a vague aspiration for an indefinite future was specifically envisaged as the culmination of comprehensive programmes of social engineering designed to reconstruct African societies to accord with the ideas and interests of a changing British Commonwealth."<sup>8</sup> Pratt goes so far as to take the 'planners' to task for doing too little, particularly in anticipating "the political fragility that would be so prominent a feature of independent states of Africa."<sup>9</sup> Or to put it in Fieldhouse's words, "the eventual transfer of power in colonial Africa by marked contrast with that in South and South-East Asia - came before the indigenous people had the experience or training necessary if they were to meet the needs of autonomous nation-states."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the decolonisation plans were implemented prematurely.

Denis Austin argues that no grand design of decolonisation existed. To assume that the 'transfer of power' in India opened the way to a total abandonment of empire is, according to him, to "interpret history in reverse."<sup>11</sup> "What is lacking in these accounts," Tony Smith states, "is a sense of the conflicts, hesitations, and uncertainties of the past, and of the attempts to reinterpret or renege on the promise of eventual independence for India."<sup>12</sup> Yet, Smith can argue in the same breath that "it was largely because Kenya was so unimportant that the British could arrange for the sale of the European farms to the Africans at full value and so created virtually overnight an export elite on whom they could base their post-independence

relation."<sup>13</sup> With 50,000 troops sent to suppress Mau Mau one wonders how many more thousands of troops would have been sent to Kenya if Kenya had been more 'important.'<sup>14</sup> And Austin cannot resist the temptation to praise British 'pragmatism' in contrast to French 'illusions' during the decolonisation period, arising out of the fact that "the British have always been an exclusive race, (for whom) the empire was always kept therefore at arms length."<sup>15</sup> In short, the British could not have cared less about decolonisation.

To be sure, some imperialist historians have tried to provide economic explanations for decolonisation. The story is that after the war Britain was apparently more intent on her own economic reconstruction than in looking after colonial 'slums' and 'cinderellas,' so that she was only too glad to relinquish them. Indeed, it was a mark of British concern and magnanimity that before throwing these territories into the unchartered and stormy waters of independence she sought to make them more viable regional federations, in addition to embarking on a comprehensive programme of colonial welfare and development. In its more sophisticated versions the thesis states that imperial states chose to end formal colonial rule in the fifties and sixties because by then they "for the first time felt confident that the European economic stake in Africa would be safe without a continued political presence."<sup>16</sup> It was an effortless transition from 'formal' to 'informal' empire, just as a century earlier there had<sup>17</sup> been a similar transition from 'informal' to formal' empire.

To students conversant with debates about the partition of Africa all this sounds familiar. It echoes Robinson and Gallagher's thesis that the colonisation of Africa signalled a transition from 'informal' to 'formal' empire because collaborative arrangements in Africa had broken down due to the rise of Arab nationalism in Egypt and Boer nationalism in the Transvaal at the turn of the 1880s, both of which threatened Britain's sea-route to India. Thus Africa was not conquered for sordid economic gain, but for strategic reasons. In short, Africa was a gigantic footnote to India. Robinson and Gallagher rested their case on that reified of historical actors, the 'official mind.'<sup>18</sup>

### For a Place in the Sun

It can be argued that these perspectives on decolonisation and colonisation are basically similar because they arise out of the same paradigm, one which is deeply rooted in Western bourgeois liberal thought.

While early writers in the liberal tradition on imperialism, such as Hobson, underscored the importance of

economic forces behind the 'new imperialism,' their successors have been at pains to deny any such linkages, and instead give primacy to non-economic factors. But there is a way in which these writers were foreshadowed, indeed, anticipated by, the Hobsonian thesis and its subsequent reformulations. Hobson argued that nothing in the logic of capitalism demanded imperialism. On the contrary, imperialism benefitted only certain trades and classes, including financiers, but colonies were virtually worthless for Britain as a nation. In fact, imperialism, which rode on the back of surplus capital thanks to the underconsumption of the workers, positively threatened to subvert popular democracy at home, encourage militarism and further pauperisation of the masses, and through colonial wars led to the "degradation of Western States and a possible debacle of Western Civilisation."<sup>19</sup>

It was a short trip from here to Schumpeter's doorsteps. Once underconsumption, the linchpin of Hobson's thesis could be disproved empirically, imperialism could be absolved of scandalous economic charges. Schumpeter revealed that there was nothing 'new' about the 'new imperialism.' Modern capitalism was, if anything, anti-imperialist by nature. Imperialism was as old as human society, a product of those irrepressible human instincts of fear, national pride, desire for conquest, and domination. The so-called 'new imperialism' was simply a resurgence of these atavistic instincts, made possible by a peculiar and an 'unnatural alliance' between a declining but still powerful 'war-oriented' nobility and a rising but not yet dominant bourgeoisie. He located this 'unnatural alliance' in Central Europe. At a stroke Britain, Belgium, Holland and the USA were exonerated of imperialism. In fact, Schumpeter confidently predicted that the USA would exhibit the weakest imperialist trend because she had the weakest pre-capitalist structures.<sup>20</sup> The path was cleared for this warm embrace by some so-called American liberal-leftists.<sup>21</sup> And the seeds were sown for the thesis that America would be in the forefront of the decolonisation struggle.

The argument, then, came to be that while there were no economic motives, and certainly no economic gains to be made from colonies. Colonies were acquired to divert attention from the social crisis in Europe, mostly Central Europe and especially Germany, arising out of rapid industrialisation and the consequent social dislocations.<sup>22</sup> Put differently, the masses in Europe were gripped by nationalistic fever, hungering for national prestige and glory. It was the masses, therefore, who forced their 'reluctant' governments to embark on the high road to colonial conquest. These 'reluctant' governments also happened to stumble into Africa because Africa provided a diversionary diplomatic chessboard for a Europe suddenly run out of room in her diplomatic corridors

following the unification of Italy and Germany, and France's defeat at the hands of the latter in 1871. Italy and Germany wanted their places in the sun as their rites of passage to nationhood and greatness. France, smarting under humiliation, wanted to redeem her prestige in Africa as well. Bismarck apparently encouraged her in order to divert her attention from Alsace-Lorraine and embroil her into conflicts with Italy, and re-orient the whole European alliance system to Germany's favour.<sup>24</sup> Thus it was Bismarck, an operator in the grand Machiavellian tradition, who was behind the partition of Africa. Wasn't the conference to discuss the modalities of partitioning the 'Dark Continent' held in the Iron Chancellor's own capital, Berlin?

We arrive at the gates of the 'official mind.' The popular claim by Eurocentric historians is that there was no public clamour in Britain for colonies. The argument that Britain occupied Egypt and Transvaal is distorted because the Egyptians and Boers had been misled by their 'nationalist agitators.' In this way, the argument runs, the ire of France and the pro-Boer sentimentality of Bismarck, (both of whom sought redress in West Africa and South West Africa, respectively) was raised, thereby unwittingly plunging Africa into colonialism. The message was too loud and Hopkins tried to tone it down. On the one hand, he argues that imperialism had an economic basis. On the other hand, he argues that capitalism had not yet reached a new stage. Anyhow, the partition came about as a result of increased competition between European and African merchants and the inability of the former to subdue the latter by themselves, without involving the power of their respective states.<sup>25</sup> It was an African crisis, a crisis in the periphery, the breakdown of previous arrangements which lay behind the partition. Africa is given her 'initiative.'

Thus Europe was beckoned, lured, forced into Africa. An Africa where life was nasty, brutish and short; a steamy, desolate continent immobilised by primitive agriculture and technology and frail and static subsistence economies. Colonialism promised to hurl Africa from long centuries of backwardness into modern civilisation, to introduce that catalyst of progress, the market system. Africa was opened up. Previously underutilised resources like land and labour were at last fully mobilised. Cash crop production increased painlessly.<sup>26</sup> Health and education were introduced. Rail lines, roads and even airports criss-crossed the once impenetrable jungles. All this cost Europe a fortune. Before long Europe began tutoring the 'natives' in the ways of 'good government.'<sup>27</sup> Then she withdrew hoping her energies had not been wasted, that Africa would steadily continue progressing along the path that Europe had carefully charted out for her, until she too became civilised. But these hopes

were soon dashed. The 'natives' soon went back to their old 'primitive' ways.

It is historical folly to suggest that momentous changes such as was decolonisation in Africa came about as a result of wilful change of heart among the imperial ruling classes. On the contrary, history is littered with the broken chains and whips of imperial intransigence. The decolonisation debate echoes that age-old debate about the abolition of the slave trade. In other words, whether the poor slaves were passive beneficiaries of pious humanitarian concern, or whether their liberation was the product of the changing economic profitability of slavery, itself partially a consequence of their own struggles.<sup>28</sup> And closer to our own times, there is that almost unreal debate over South Africa as to whether apartheid will die by appealing and converting the Boers to 'reason,' or through mass uprising and revolution. At their most elegant, the liberals would like us to believe that economic growth per se provides the surest, if slowest, way of loosening the apartheid grip before its final dissolution, because advanced industrial capitalism is integrative, rational, efficient and non-ascriptive, therefore incompatible with 'racial separation.'<sup>29</sup> But apartheid is not merely racial separation, it is the very structure that capitalism has taken in South Africa.

The thesis of 'planned decolonisation' constitutes an attempt to 'denationalise' and delegitimise the post-colonial state in Africa, demobilise popular politics and search for alternative social systems. Clearly then, there has been a calculated effort to leave the future of Africa totally captive to external agencies, not to the peoples of Africa themselves. One does not need to have a conspiratorial cast of mind to see that this provides ideological fuel for the IMF and World Bank offensive against more self-reliant and integrated strategies of economic development and social transformation. Or that the alleged failure of African independence is used by the accomplices and propagandists of South Africa to demobilise the mounting internal and international struggles against apartheid, the most virulent form of colonial capitalism to ever walk the African continent.

#### At the Feet of Mammon

At the core of the liberal view of politics is the assumption that conflict does not, or need not, run very deep and that it can be 'managed' by the exercise of reason and good will, and a readiness to compromise and agree.<sup>30</sup> Thus politics is not civil war conducted by other means but a continuous process of bargaining and accommodation on the

basis of accepted procedures in pursuit of a common and harmonious future.

The liberal assumptions about the basic unity of mankind are based on the power of reason and possibilities of reasoned progress. Rooted in an enduring sense of historical destiny and human purpose (the so-called Age of Enlightenment out of a configuration of European belief systems combining a Judaic voluntaristic conception of man, a Christian eschatological view of history and an Aristotelian<sup>31</sup> notion of imminent change) were born theories of evolution.

The development of human social life came to be depicted as a progression from simple to complex forms by means of continuous processes of growth and specialisation. All human societies were assumed to follow a unilineal course between these two polar types from a simple 'primitive' to a complex 'modern' society. Like yeast, this Social Darwinism transformed the sour dough of inchoate ideas about non-European societies and human development into coherent and systematised social science loaves of bread. The celebrated unity of mankind became refractive as the present conditions of 'primitive' people mirror the prehistory of Western society, the ultimate embodiment of all the relevant evolutionary adaptations of all previous civilisations. The bourgeois era simply marks the end of the human evolutionary process there is nothing after it.

It is but a small step from evolutionary to modernisation theory and doomsday scenarios. The abstracted, generalised history of European development is turned into the inexorable logic of human development. Development or modernisation merely becomes a process of change towards those types of social, economic, and political systems to be found in Western Europe and North America.<sup>32</sup> In historical discourse this becomes 'Euro-centrism.' Capitalism is presented as the end of history for the West has all the solutions to basic human needs. The IMFs and World Banks have the patented programmes to liberate Africa from the shackles of backwardness. Look at the 'success stories' of South East Asia. It is possible for the whole world to become 'modernised,' to be remade in the image of Western Europe, like America was, and for mankind to become truly one.<sup>33</sup>

The globalisation of development thinking, however, soon led to concern about the availability and interaction of global physical resources. Could global 'modernisation' be sustained in the face of finite resources? Was global development to be equalised at American levels of consumption or stifled at a standard between a Portugal and an India? These doubts were encouraged partly by the successful assault on modernisation models by dependency theories which offered

radically different explanations of poverty and underdevelopment.<sup>34</sup> The dependency challenge quickly gave rise to calls for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). Around the same time oil prices rose sharply, in what was the first instance of concerted political defiance by the Third World. These developments coincided with the end of the long post-war boom in the West. A period of prolonged and deepening crisis had set in for the capitalist system. Suddenly the future dimmed. Liberalism was in crisis.

Hysterical doomsday scenarios were painted for the world.<sup>35</sup> Malthusian fears of overpopulation were whipped up. World future theories gained currency. Despite varying models, techniques of extrapolation and simulation, and doses of pessimism, it was shown that under the weight of 'uncontrolled' population growth, accompanied as it was by limits to agricultural growth, depletion of mineral resources, dropping world water levels, and spreading ecological and psychic pollution, the 'world system' would buckle and collapse. Unless of course every regional component of this system displayed 'responsibility' to maintain 'equilibrium' and ensure the survival of the whole. Thus it might be more prudent for the Third World to forsake industrialisation with its dangers of resource depletion and global pollution. Redistribution, not more growth at least not at the global level, was the answer to the North-South dichotomy. Certainly there was nothing but doom for those who wanted to opt out of the system.

The notion of redistribution offered the bourgeois liberal tradition a possible outlet from the ideological paralysis in which it found itself by the mid-seventies. It not only partly met Third World calls for a NIEO, it also sought to sugar-coat the structures of the international division of labour. A stream of articulate and morally appealing reports appeared towards the close of the seventies spelling out the international reforms and institutional changes necessary to create a prosperous, harmonious, and peaceful 'world community.' Multinationals were called upon to change heart and adopt codes of conduct which would harmonise their profit motives with development interests of Third World countries. The Superpowers were exhorted to abandon their murderous and obscenely expensive arms-race and divert their resources to peaceful ends. Third World states did not escape admonition either. They were asked to abandon autarchist tendencies, control their population growth, and take the question of domestic redistribution seriously.<sup>36</sup> Thus developed the concept of 'basic needs.'

The World Bank eagerly embraced the new concept and overnight became a spokesman for the poor, insisting on international 'aid' to be targeted at meeting their basic

needs.<sup>37</sup> As the self-appointed watchdog of the poor, the World Bank sought to intervene even more directly in the running of African economies. Thus while the right of African countries to own and control their natural resources and determine their own economic policies was still formally recognised, the basic needs approach queries the right of these states to act as the ultimate arbiters of their peoples' affairs. What the World Bank achieves in the name of 'basic needs,' the IMF as the policeman of the world capitalist financial structure does in the name of 'fiscal responsibility.' In both cases African sovereignty is undermined. Regardless of her client's condition the IMF, invariably prescribes cuts in public expenditure, currency devaluations, and removals of import controls. A very sick patient, we are always morbidly reminded, needs radical surgery. Africa is sick, her economies are in shambles, her future doomed unless she can be saved by the West. Did not the West perform the same function almost a hundred years ago?

#### Unscrambling the Political Kingdom

Watchdogs need violators and policemen need criminals to conduct and justify their trades. That something is rotten in the affairs of that much sought after political kingdom, is now almost unanimously agreed upon. The more forgiving ones attribute this to natural calamities. It is true that since the 1970s, the sun seems to have conspired against vast stretches of Africa, spitting heat and drought, and reducing in its wake whole regions to ecological wastelands. But nature does not make a good culprit, if only because it cannot be accused of 'willful' intent. It is easier to blame 'people.' What can be more culpable than Africa's notorious capacity for reproduction, at 3% annually, easily the highest population growth rate in the world. Such prolificacy makes a mockery of Africa's anemic economic rates of growth, far outstripping the crawling increases in agricultural productivity. And then there is the perennial culprit of 'tribalism.' Hardly had the colonial flags been hauled down and the nationalist flags been hoisted than the primordial instincts of "tribal and clan loyalties" and hatreds resurfaced and hang like an albatross on the necks of the new states, diverting their attention from development, and wasting their frail energies in endless orgies of violence, often consumed in prolonged civil wars. A tragedy compounded by a singular genius for producing exceptionally brutal, incompetent, and corrupt leaders. Mix overpopulation, tribalism and dictatorships and you have an explosive concoction of political violence, popular lethargy, and economic stagnation.

Now historians are entering the fray. Abandoning their haughty indifference to recent events, otherwise known as 'contemporary history,' professional historians have brought their archives to bear on the debate and, in keeping with their calling, they are tracing the roots of the crisis of the post-colonial state to its progenitor, the colonial state. This has always been alleged by those dogged defenders of African independence. But the historians' project is not to offer proof for such allegations, rather it is to underline the insolubility of the crisis, that is, on terms other than those rooted in the colonial capitalist genus.

Crawford Young claims that today's "profound and dispiriting crisis," is, in part, a crisis of the state itself...reflected in its problematic relationship with civil society, its propensity for over-consumption, and its inability to effectively organise the quest for development." The roots of the crisis, he postulates, "may lie in the nature of the colonial state legacy."<sup>38</sup> The unusual disjuncture between the state and civil society and rampant authoritarianism in Africa arises out of the manner in which the colonial state was created. The scramble in Africa was far more concentrated, intense, and competitive than in other regions. Moreover, the colonial state-building venture in Africa included a far more comprehensive cultural project than was the rule in Asia or the Middle East. Finally, colonial expansion in Africa occurred when European states were fully developed and consolidated, and therefore less likely to experiment with indigenous political structures. In other words, the problems of hegemony, security, autonomy, legitimation and revenue, the five components for the state's *raison d'être* according to Young, were more pressing and required constant application of brute force, certainly during the first phase of colonial state construction. Moreover then, the doctrine of state was primarily directed toward the metropolitan and external audience.

Although this was no longer exclusively so during the second phase of consolidation with the articulation of colonial ideologies of development, good government, and trusteeship, the stirrings of civil society only marginally percolated into the official consciousness. It would not be until the final phase of decolonisation, that there was an attempt to foster "a constitutionalised state-civil society relationship, mediated by open political competition, served as legitimating myth for the power transfer process itself."<sup>39</sup> The official classes in the metropole had planned the demise of colonialism because they were confident that their proprietary rights would continue, and hoped that the 'native elites' they had tutored in the arts of 'good government' would proceed to consolidate stability and democracy. Before long, however, "the ephemeral nature of the graft cuttings of

parliamentary democracy upon the "robust trunk of colonial autocracy" became all too apparent.<sup>40</sup> The nationalist parties degenerated into intransigent political monopolies or exclusive oligarchies, and coups became institutionalised mechanisms for succession. And Populist ideologies could not camouflage tendencies toward personalisation of rule and patrimonialisation of the state. Why? What had gone wrong?

Hegemony and legitimisation eluded the new rulers essentially because the post-colonial state was the product of the colonial state's succeeded "in organising its own metamorphosis."<sup>41</sup> Indeed, it was unfortunate that decolonisation was too short to consolidate and institutionalise the 'constitutionalised state-civil society relationship.' In the words of Richard Joseph, "The third of the three colonial stages was a mere parenthesis, a pause, in the process of state formation and articulation. Following its own logic, once the metamorphosis was successfully engineered, this state-in-formation was returned to the process of construction and institutionalisation, with subsequent parenthesis no longer requiring a time-specific term of 'decolonisation' but the more generic one of democratisation."<sup>42</sup> Amen! Whence this new kingdom? "The answer, Young asserts, "probably will lie in a reconceptualisation of the state."<sup>43</sup> By whom? For whom? There is no answer.

That the state is distinguished by its political domination over a territory, that its domination is enshrined in a legal system, that it is usually buttressed by a monopoly of overwhelming legitimation of that domination, cannot be gainsaid.<sup>44</sup> But the question remains, who dominates? And what is this domination for? It is here that liberalism flounders. It tends to see the state as the trustee, instrument, or agent of 'society as a whole,' a neutral referee arbitrating between competing interests, whose trajectory is ultimately the realisation of 'democracy' as in the West. This paradigmatic gospel, presented in a bewildering array of clientelist, developmentalist, structural-functionalist and patrimonial models, mystifies the state as an arena of class struggle and above all, the state as an essential means of domination. This is the stuff from which illusions are bred. If only the "managerial capacity of the leaders" could be improved,<sup>45</sup> or more African leaders could adopt the "statesmanship exemplified by Senghor's voluntary retirement and Nyerere's announcement to the same end."<sup>46</sup> Or if our beloved leaders could be convinced of the need to "end terror as an instrument of government, and the democratisation of government and political structures,"<sup>47</sup> then Africa might just conceivably be saved from her present crippling crisis.

It is a crisis of leadership, a failure of will and reason and a moral challenge to the world. The democratic West cannot stand idly by and watch a whole continent sink into oblivion because of her ruthless and predatory rulers, or the unfortunate legacies of decolonisation plans implemented with indecent haste. For a start let the IMF and World Bank help them to put their economies on a more sound footing. After all, we still inhabit the same nice little globe.

### Conclusion

History never repeats itself, at any rate, not exactly. But Africa is today at a crossroads; imperialism is hovering over her more menacingly than at any time since independence. Nationalism has become but a distant memory, except in the recently liberated and still to be liberated states in Southern Africa; the crisis looks overwhelming, the future foreboding. The Western media buttresses this psychology of despair. The diagnosis is in, and who else is better qualified to give it the seal of approval than the 'scholarly,' 'disinterested' historian. Independence so ceremoniously granted has failed so miserably.<sup>48</sup> Thus Africa's struggles for independence are derided, glowing balance sheets of colonialism are painted, and succour is given to chilling prospects of a new 'civilising mission', a message eagerly seized upon by imperialism's overseers today, the World Bank and the IMF, who march astride the continent with briefcases full of the same ineffective but repackaged formulas that seek to strengthen Africa's apron strings to a system that is itself in deep crisis.

The case must be restated, and boldly, that decolonisation has been the product of concerted and bitter struggles waged across the width and breadth of Africa. The Africa of the post-war world was a continent seething with the convulsions of large-scale and often violent strikes, protracted peasant unrest which intermittently spilled into open revolt, civil riots and acts of disobedience in the burgeoning colonial towns and cities. Riding the crest were mass-based but petty-bourgeois led nationalist parties crying 'independence now!' Capping it all were the armed risings - Madagascar, 1947-8; Kenya, 1952-55; Cameroun, 1955; and Algeria, 1953-60; and the outbreak of similarly decisive guerrilla wars in the settler and imperialist redound of Southern Africa at the turn of the sixties-Angola, 1961, Mozambique, 1964, Zimbabwe and Namibia, 1966; and South Africa itself, 1961. Imperialism was on the retreat; the economic, political, social, military, and even psychological costs of maintaining colonialism in Africa had become unbearably high for the old powers of Europe who had emerged from the Second

World War broke and devastated, now destined to play second fiddle to the new Superpowers.

No amount of crisis in Africa today should be allowed to promote the thesis that independence was won on the cheap, nay, that it was granted, and that indeed Africans were better off during colonial rule. The simple fact of the matter is that colonialism was historically backward for Africa. It is also important to put Africa's contemporary crisis into perspective, not only in terms of its roots, effects, and trajectory, but also in its global context. Yes, it is part of a global capitalist crisis. Witness the growing inter-imperialist rivalries expressed in rising protectionism, militarism, and collapsing multilateralism, while the Third World as a whole, not just Africa, chafes under irrepayable debts, unmanageable social dislocation, hunger, and starvation.<sup>49</sup> The swelling armies of the unemployed in the West find their counterparts in the bloated ranks of the hungry in the Third World, the violent strikes in mines and industries of the West are echoed in the angry food riots in the teeming slums of the Third World, and the mounting anti-militarist crusade in the West is paralleled by a gathering anti-imperialist momentum in the Third World. Thus capitalism's present crisis, including its contorted African forms, should not obscure the continuing, bitter struggles against imperialism and the structures and social classes that mediate it at regional and national levels. During the crisis of the 1930s the face of the world was changed. On the one hand there was the rise of fascism in Europe, and on the other the beginning of national liberation movements in the colonies, while Britain and the USA uneasily sought Keynesian 'New Deals.' Similarly, in the womb of the present crisis are struggling disparate futures to be born, some progressive, others not so, within and outside capitalism.

Certainly history is not over, capitalism is not the culmination of human development, and Africa's future is far from foreclosed by the present crisis. One of liberalism's greatest weaknesses is that it has no conception or the possibility of a conception, of a stage after the present one, of the day after capitalism, hence its inclination towards doomsday positions. This arises out of the fact that liberalism is rooted in idealism, empiricism, and bourgeois ideology, which combined, make liberal interpretations ahistorical, more mystifying than explanatory. Any useful intellectual tradition must be historical in method, materialist in content, conjunctural in its periodisations, and sensitive to the centrality of conflict and struggle in effecting transformations of social structures and systems. For in the end, our purpose must not simply be to appreciate the importance of the past, but to comprehend the present, and change the future.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>See T. Zeleza, "African History: The Rise and Decline of Academic Tourism," Ufahamu, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1983; H. Bernstein and J. Depelchin, "The Object of African History: A Materialist Perspective," History in Africa, vols. 5, 6, 1978-1979; and A.J. Temu and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History: A Critique. Zed Press, London, 1981.

<sup>2</sup>J. D. Fage. A History of Africa. Hutchinson, London, 1978.

<sup>3</sup>See B. A. Ogot. "Whose History? - The Dilemmas of Research in Early African History," Chairman's Address to the Historical Association of Kenya Annual Conference, August, 1984, Nairobi.

<sup>4</sup>D. A. Low, "The Asian Mirror to Tropical Africa's Independence," in P. Gifford and W. R. Louis, eds. The Transfer of Power in Africa, Decolonisation, 1940-1960. Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, pp. 3, 28.

<sup>5</sup>W.R. Louis and R. Robinson, "The United States and the Liquidation of British Empire in Tropical Africa, 1941-1951," Ibid., p. 47. Also see Louis's Imperialism at Bay: The Role of the United States in the Decolonisation of the British Empire 1941-1945, New York, OUP, 1977.

<sup>6</sup>R. Robinson, "Andrew Cohen and the Transfer of Power in Tropical Africa, 1940-1951," in W. H. Morris, Jones and G. Fisher, eds., A Decolonisation and Africa: The British and French Experience. Franck Cass, 1980, pp.60, 66.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 52-53.

<sup>8</sup>J.D. Hargreaves, "Towards the Transfer of Power in British West Africa," in Gifford and Louis, op cit., p. 132; also see his "Assumptions, Expectations, and Plans: Approaches to Decolonisation in Sierra Leone," in Morris-Jones and Fisher, Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Cranford Pratt, "Colonial Governments and the Transfer of Power in East Africa," in Gifford and Louis, Ibid., p.259.

<sup>10</sup>D.K. Fieldhouse, "Decolonisation, Development and Dependence: A Survey of Changing Attitudes," in Gifford and Louis, Ibid., p. 512.

<sup>11</sup>Denis Austin, "The Transfer of Power - Why and How?" in Morris - Jones and Fisher, op cit. p. 10; also see his "The British point of No Return?" in Gifford and Louis, Ibid.

12 Tony Smith, "Patterns in the Transfer of Power: A Comparative Study of French and British Decolonisation," in Gifford and Louis, *Ibid.*, p. 89.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 115.

14 I have examined Kenya's decolonisation in "Decolonisation: The Kenyan Case," Paper presented to the Symposium to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Colonial Rule in Africa, York University, Toronto, Canada, September, 1984; and with B. A. Ogot, "Kenya: The Road to Independence," Paper presented to a conference at the University of Zimbabwe, January 8-11, 1985, on "African Independence: Origins and Consequences of the Transfer of Power, 1956-1980." Except for a few papers, mostly by African historians, the current decolonisation thesis was annoyingly peddled.

15 Austin, "The Transfer of Power..." A more illuminating comparative analysis of the decolonisation of the French and British empires can be found in R. Von Albertini, Decolonisation: The Administration and Future of the Colonies 1919-1960. Doubleday, 1971, although he ignores the role of nationalism almost entirely. Among other more recent imperialist works on decolonisation see A. H. M. Kirk-Greene, ed., The Transfer of Power: The Colonial Administration in the Age of Decolonisation. OUP, 1979; D. J. Morgan, The Official History of Colonial Development, Humanities Press, Vols. 1-5, particularly vol. 5; Guidance Towards Self Government in British Colonies; J. M. Lee and M. Petter, The Colonial Office, War and Development Policy, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1982.

16 Fieldhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 14. I have argued that Britain needed the colonies more, not less, after the war in, "The Political Economy of British Colonial Development and Welfare in Africa," Paper presented to the 14th Annual Conference the Canadian Association of African Studies, Antigonish, N. S., Canada, May, 1984.

17 See R. W. Winks, "On Decolonisation and Informal Empire," American Historical Review, 81, no. 3, 1976; on the notion of 'informal empire' see, J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," Economic History Review, 5-6, March, 1953; and R. Robinson, "Non-European Foundations of European Imperialism" Sketch for a Theory of Collaboration," in R. Owen and B. Sutcliffe, eds., Studies in the Theory of Imperialism, Longman, 1972; also see W. R. Louis, Imperialism: The Robinson and Gallagher Controversy, New Viewpoints, 1976.

18 R. Robinson and J. Gallagher, African and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism, OUP, 1961.

<sup>19</sup>J.A. Hobson, Imperialism, A Study, Allen and Unwin, London, 1938, p. 137.

<sup>20</sup>Joseph Schumpeter, Imperialism and Social Classes, A. M. Kelly, New York, 1951.

<sup>21</sup>See, for instance, Daniel Bell, The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism, Heinemann, London, 1979 edition, chapter 6.

<sup>22</sup>Hans-Ulrich Wehler, Bismarck and Imperialism, Cologne, 1969.

<sup>23</sup>C.J.H. Hayers, A Generation of Materialism, 1871-1900, Harper and Row, New York, 1941.

<sup>24</sup>N. Mansergh, The Coming of the First World War: A Study in the European Balance, 1878-1914, Longmans, London, 1949; and A. J. P. Taylor, Germany's Bid for Colonies, 1884-5, London, 1938.

<sup>25</sup>A.G. Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa Columbia University Press, New York, 1972, chapter 4.

<sup>26</sup>Hopkins, *Ibid.*, uses this vent-for-surplus theory to explain change in the early colonial era. So do J. S. Hogendorn, "Economic Initiative and African Cash Farming: Pre-Colonial Origins and Early Colonial Development," in Gann and Duignan, Colonialism in Africa, Vol. 1; R. Szereszewski, Structural Changes in the Economy of Ghana, 1891-1911. Weidenfeld Nicolson, London, 1965. For a radical critique of this theory see W. M. Freund and R. W. Shenton, "Vent for Surplus' Theory and Economic History of West Africa," Savanna, 6, 1977.

<sup>27</sup>For some of the earlier writings praising the planning and foresight of the Colonial Office and the activities of colonial governments in tutoring the African elites during decolonisation see J. M. Lee, Colonial Development and Good Government, OUP, 1967; D. A. Low Lion Rampart: Essays in the Study of British Imperialism, Cass, London, 1973; K. E. Robinson, The Dilemmas of Trusteeship, OUP, 1965; Margery Perham, The Colonial Reckoning, Collins, London, 1961, and Colonial Sequences, Methuen, London, 1967. The most unabashed balance sheets of colonialism are drawn by Peter Duignan and Lewis H. Gann, Burden of Empire, New York, 1967; also see their jointly edited, Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960, 5 vols. Cambridge, 1969-1975.

<sup>28</sup>Some of the pugilists in the idealist - materialist debate on abolition are R. Coupland, The British Anti-Slavery Movement. T. Butterworth Ltd, London, 1933; and Eric

Williams, Capitalism and Slavery, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1944. For an overview see Michael Craton, Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery, Garden City, New York, 1974.

<sup>29</sup>See H. M. Wright, The Burden of the Present: Liberal Radical Controversy Over Southern African History, Rex Collins, London, 1977; and H. F. Kenny, "The Poverty of Neo-Marxism: The Case of South Africa," and H. Weipe's response, "A Comment on 'The Poverty of Neo-Marxism,'" in Journal of Southern African Studies, vol. 3, no. 1, 1976, and vol. 4, no. 2, 1978, respectively. Also see M. Lipton, "The Debate about South Africa: Neo-Marxists and Neo-Liberals," African Affairs, 78, 1976; F. Johnstone, "White Prosperity and White Supremacy in South Africa Today," African Affairs, 69, 1970.

<sup>30</sup>Ralph Miliband, Marxism and Politics, OUP, New York 1977, Chapter 2.

<sup>31</sup>See Sidney Pollard, The Idea of Progress: History and Society, Watts, London, 1968.

<sup>32</sup>See W. W. Rostow, Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto, Cambridge University Press, 1971; Talcott Parsons, The Social System, Free Press, Glencoe, 1951 and essays in A. N. Agawala and S. P. Singh, eds., The Economics of Underdevelopment OUP, 1958; and G. E. Meier, ed., Leading Issues in Development Economics, OUP, 1976. The literature on development economics and sociology is ably reviewed in detail by A. M. M. Hoogvelt, The Sociology of Developing Societies, Macmillan, London, 1976.

<sup>33</sup>See, for example, H. Kahn, World Economic Development, 1979 and Beyond, Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1979.

<sup>34</sup>See A. G. Frank, Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1967; and Latin America: Underdevelopment, or Resolution? Monthly Review Press, New York, 1969; Walter Rodney, How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, Tanzania Publishing House, Dar es Salaam, 1972; Arghiri Emmanuel, Unequal Exchange, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972, and Sannir Amin, Accumulation on a World Scale, vols. 1 and 2, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1974.

<sup>35</sup>See A. M. M. Hoogvelt, The Third World in Global Development, Macmillan, London, 1982, Chapter 4. Among these Doomsday scenarios see D. Meadows et. al. The Limits to Growth: A Report for the Club of Rome's Project on the Predicament of Mankind, Universe Books, New York, 1974; R. L.

Heilbrower, Business Civilization in Decline, Boyars, 1976; and Barbara Ward and R. Dubois, Only One Earth, Deutsch, 1972.

<sup>36</sup>See Brardt Report, North - South: A Programme for Survival, Pan Books, 1980.

<sup>37</sup>Hoogvelt, op cit. (1982), chapter 2, The World Bank position is spelled out in a text edited by the Bank's Vice-President: Chenery et. al., Redistribution With Growth, and Paul Streeten, Basic Needs, IBRAD, 1977. (For a critical discussion of this concept see R. H. Green, "Basic Human Needs: Concept of Slogan, Synthesis of Smokescreen? IDS Bulletin, June 1978; and Dharam Gai, "Basic Needs and Its Critics," IDS Bulletin June 1978.

<sup>38</sup>Crawford Young, "The Colonial State and Its Connection to Current Political Crises in Africa," Paper presented to the Conference on African Independence and Consequences of the Transfer of Power, 1956-1980, University of Harare, January, 1985, p.1.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p.59.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p.58.

<sup>42</sup>Richard A. Joseph, "Cameroon Since Independence: Towards a New Conceptual Framework," Paper presented to the Conference on African Independence, op. cit., p. 2, p. 24.

<sup>43</sup>Young, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>44</sup>See Yaw Saffu, "The Post-Colonial State in Africa: Some Preliminary Observations on an Emerging Theory," Paper presented at the 6th Annual Conference of the African Studies Association of Australia and the Pacific, Monash University, August, 1983, p. 5. Lamine Kaba, "From Colonialism to Autocracy: Guinea Under Sekou Toure," Paper presented to the Conference on African Independence, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>46</sup>B.H. Selassie, "Somali Independence, 1960: A Nation in Search of a State," Paper presented to the Conference on African Independence, Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>47</sup>Joseph, op.cit., p. 27.

<sup>48</sup>The organisers of the Harare Conference on African Independence and the Consequences of the Transfer of Power, who also organised an earlier conference from which the book edited by Gifford and Louis (see footnote 4 above), are planning to organise a third conference whose theme will be:

The Disappearance of Power in Africa. So who says that this is not an intellectual offensive?

<sup>49</sup>See A.G. Frank, Crisis: In the World Economy, Heinemann, London, 1980; and the sequel, Crisis: In the Third World, Heinemann, London, 1981.

### Contexts

The study considers five chapters. In chapter one the author gives a brief history of the various ways in which Pan-Africanism has been conceived and interpreted (from the time the concept first appeared in America in 1901 to the 1955 conference that founded the OAU in Addis Ababa). The initial form of Pan-Africanism, the author indicates, centered on solidarity among people of African descent in the Americas, its champion being Marcus Garvey with his 'Back to Africa Movement,' and W.E.B. Dubois using the concept as anti-colonialist. Once the concept got entrenched in Africa itself (1945-1962), the currents of thought narrowed: revolutionaries like Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara, independence and African unity, and revolutionaries like Kwame Nkrumah who wanted 'Independent Africa' and others like Amilcar Cabral who wanted 'Liberation War,' and others like the authors of 'Africa Must Unite.' Out of these are different ideological camps, a common one was struck only after the OAU.

Chapter two deals with the evolution of the African economy and the imperialist nations' attempts to keep it in a primitive state of African slavery. It is this, the author feels, the chapter continues, that can provide the key for understanding the manner in which the majority of the 22 nations are unable to explain the politics of the various ruling classes during the first twenty years of independence.

Chapter three attempts to develop the explanation of the above failures which the author terms the 'sliding of Pan-African thought.' This, he indicates, is the process being undertaken by the emerging African non-colonial bourgeoisie who receive the advice of the masses of Africa and world workers about economic development, an all embracing and political unity. This chapter ends by defining Pan-Africanism as the political theory that asserts that Africa is a single entity with a common set of problems and will work to ensure its liberation from imperialist exploitation and enslavement (world's class). The author concludes:

... there have always been two elements of this Pan-Africanism, a revolutionary form and a reactionary form. Revolutionary Pan-Africanism has, during each historical period, explicitly or implicitly recognized the conscious and unconscious interests and contradictions of the exploited African working